

Media Note

Office of the Spokesman
Washington, DC

The U.S. Olympic Committee and the U.S. Department of State today announced that they will be partnering with the International Olympic Committee to host and train Iraqi wrestlers in their pursuit of participating in the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece.

Working with the IOC's Solidarity Department, the USOC and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs will be coordinating an extended training program for four Iraqi wrestlers and two coaches beginning in February and continuing on through June of 2004 at the USOC's Colorado Springs Training Center. Working in cooperation with USA Wrestling, the USOC will be hosting two freestyle wrestlers and a coach along with two Greco-Roman wrestlers and a coach.

The wrestling program will be the second exchange that the USOC, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and IOC Solidarity have worked together on. They supported a similar program last year for the Iraqi archery team that participated in the World Archery Championships held in New York.

"As the newly elected president of the Iraqi Olympic committee, I am deeply grateful that the U.S. State Department and the USOC have generously supported the rebuilding of Iraq athletes, the offer to support the training of an Iraqi team will go a long way towards restarting the competitors of our programs to returning pride to the Iraqi people." states Ahmed Al Samarrai Chairman of the Iraqi Olympic Committee.

The relationship between the USOC and Iraqi sport emanated from a June, 2003 summit in Kuwait City where leaders of the USOC, IOC, U.S. Government and the Olympic Council of Asia met to strategize future support for Iraqi athletes in their attempt to qualify and participate at the Athens Olympic and Paralympic Games.

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